

**Richard Varick, 1775, Letterbook 1 Introduction, from  
The Writings of George Washington from the Original  
Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick,  
Editor.**

**To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS**

Cambridge, November 28, 1775.

Sir: I had the Honor of writing to you the 19th

instant, I have now to inform you that Henry Knox Esqr. is gone to New York, with orders to forward to this place, what cannon and ordinance can be there procured. From thence he will proceed to General Schuyler on the same Business, as you will see by the inclosed Copy of Instructions, which I have given him. It would give me much satisfaction that this Gentleman, or any other whom you may think qualified, was appointed to the command of the Artillery Regiment. In my Letter to you of the 8th. Instant, I have expressed myself fully on this Subject, which I beg leave to recommend to your immediate attention, as the formation of that Corps will be at a stand, until I am honored with your Instructions thereon.

The Vessel laden with wine, which I advised you was wrecked on this coast, proves to have been the property of a Thomas Salter of Philadelphia, the papers relative to her and cargo were sent to Robert Morris Esqr who can give you every information thereon. The Schooner with the Dry Goods from Boston to Halifax is given up to the Committee of Safety at Beverly, who will dispose of her and Cargo, agreeable to the decision of a Court of Admiralty and the Schooner carried into Portsmouth by Captain Adams proves to be a friends and of course is discharged.

## Library of Congress

There are two persons engaged to go to Nova Scotia, on the Business recommended in your last,

by the best information we have from thence, the Stores &c. have been withdrawn sometime; should this not be the case, It is next to an impossibility to attempt any thing there in the present unsettled and precarious state of the Army. Colonel Enos is arrived and under arrest, he acknowledges he had no Orders for coming away, his Trial cannot come on, until I hear from Col. Arnold, from whom there is no Account since I wrote you last.

From what I can collect, by my inquiries amongst the Officers, It will be impossible to get the men to enlist for the continuance of the War, which will be an insuperable Obstruction to the formation of the two Battalions of Marines on the plan resolved on in Congress. As it can make no difference I propose to proceed on the new Arrangement of the Army and when completed, enquire out such Officers and Men as are best qualified for that service, and endeavor to form these Battalions out of the whole; This appears to me the best method and will I hope meet the approbation of Congress. As it will be very difficult for the Men to work when the hard frost sets in, I have thought it necessary (tho' of little use at present) to take possession of Cobble Hill, for the benefit of any future Operations. It was effected without the least opposition from the Enemy the 23d Instant: Their inactivity on this Occasion is what I can not account for; It is probable they are meditating a Blow some where. About 300 Men, Women and

Children of the poor Inhabitants of Boston, came out to Point Shirley last Friday, they have brought their Household furniture, but unprovided of every other necessary of Life: I have recommended them to the attention of the Committee of the Honorable Council of this Province, now sitting at Water Town.

The number enlisted since my last are 2540 men. I am very sorry to be necessitated to mention to you the egregious want of Public Spirit which reigns here; instead of pressing

## Library of Congress

to be engaged in the cause of their Country, which I vainly flattered myself would be the case, I find we are likely to be deserted at a most critical time; Those that have Inlisted, must have a furlough, which I have been Obligated to grant to 50 at a time from each Regiment. The Connecticut Troops upon whom I reckoned are as backward, indeed if possible more so than the people of this colony, our situation is truly Alarming, and of this General Howe is well apprized, It being the common topick of conversation when the People left Boston last Friday; no doubt when he is reinforced he will avail himself of the Information.

I am making the best disposition I can for our defence having thrown up, besides the Works on Cobble Hill, several redoubts, Half Moons &ca. along the Bay; And I fear I shall be under the necessity of calling in the Militia and Minute Men of the Country

to my Assistance. I say I fear it, because by what I can learn from the Officers in the Army belonging to this Colony, it will be next to an impossibility to keep them under any degree of Discipline, and that it will be very difficult to prevail on them to remain a moment longer than they chuse themselves; It is a mortifying reflection to be reduced to this dilemma, there has been nothing wanting on my part to infuse a proper Spirit amongst the Officers, that they may exert their Influence with the Soldiery. You see by a fortnights recruiting amongst men with Arms in their Hands, how little has been the success.

As the small Pox is now in Boston, I have used the precaution of prohibiting such as lately came out from coming near our Camp. General Burgoyne I am informed will soon embark for England. I think the risque too great to write you by Post, whilst it continues to pass thro' New York, it is certain that a post has been intercepted the begining of last Month, as they sent out several Letters from Boston with the Post mark at Baltimore on them, this goes by Captain Joseph Blewer who promises to deliver it carefully unto you.

You doubtless will have heard ere this reaches, of General Montgomery having got Possession of Montreal, I congratulate you thereon, he has troubles with his Troops

## Library of Congress

as well as I have—all I can learn of Colo: Arnold is that he is near Quebec, I hope Montgomery will be able

to proceed to his Assistance I shall be very uneasy until I hear they are joined. My best respects to Congress, etc. I have the Honor, etc.<sup>23</sup>

23. In the writing of Stephen Moylan.

### **To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS**

Cambridge, December 14, 1775.

Sir: The two French Gentlemen, who will appear before you with this, brought recommendations to me from Governor Cooke of Providence, their names are, Messieurs Pennet and De Pliarne.

They purpose a plan for supplying this Continent with Arms and Ammunition, which appears to me very eligible; as I am not acquainted with the extent of Schemes already formed by Congress for the attainment of these necessary Articles, I have declined entering into any Engagements with them, but have prevailed with them to proceed, at the public expence to Philadelphia and there through you to lay their proposals before Congress, or a Committee of Congress, to whose attention I beg leave to recommend them and the important Business they come upon.<sup>57</sup> I am &ca.

P. S: I have given these Gentlemen reason to expect that they can get back to the Cape as commodiously and speedily from Philadelphia as they could from Providence, in which I should be

57. Penet and Pliarne presented Washington's letter December 30, and Congress resolved "That the same be referred to the Secret Committee, who are directed to confer

## Library of Congress

with the bearers, and pursue such measures as they may think proper for the interest of the United Colonies.” (See *Journals of the Continental Congress*.)

very sorry they were disappointed.

### To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

Head Quarters, Cambridge, April 1, 1776.

Sir: This Letter will be delivered you by Jonathan Eddy Esq. the Gentlemen from Nova Scotia who I mentioned to you in mine of the 27th. Ult.; He seems desirous of waiting on the Honorable Congress in order to lay before them the State of Public Affairs and situation of the Inhabitants of that Province; and as it might be in his Power to communicate many things personally which could not be so well done by Letter, I encouraged

him in his design and have advanced him fifty Dollars to defray his expences. The Accadian accompanies him, and as they seem to be solid, judicious Men, I beg leave to recommend them both to the Notice of Congress.<sup>92</sup> And am most respectfully, Sir, etc.<sup>93</sup>

92. The Province of Nova Scotia was more or less of an objective throughout the greater part of the war and there are a number of spy reports of conditions therein, plans of the harbor of Halifax, etc., in the *Washington Papers*. No expedition was ever launched against it.

93. In the writing of William Palfrey.

### To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

New York, July 17, 1776.

Sir: I was this Morning Honoured with yours

## Library of Congress

of the 15th instant with Sundry Resolves. I perceive the Measures Congress have taken to expedite the raising of the Flying Camp and providing it with Articles of the greatest use. You will see by a postscript to my Letter of the 14, I had wrote to the commanding Officer of the Pennsylvania Militia, ordering them to be marched from Trenton to Amboy, as their remaining there, could not Answer the least public Good. For having consulted with sundry Gentlemen I was informed, if the Enemy mean to direct their views towards Pennsylvania, or penetrate the Jerseys, their Route will be from near Amboy and either by way of Brunswick or Bound Brook. The lower road from South Amboy being thro.' a Woody and Sandy country; besides they will be then able to throw in succour here and to receive it from hence in cases of Emergency.

The Connecticut Light Horse mentioned in my Letter of the 11th., notwithstanding their then promise to continue here for the defence of this place, are now discharged and about to return Home; having peremptorily refused all kind of fatigue duty, or even to mount Guard, claiming an exemption, as Troopers.

Tho' their Assistance is much needed and might be of Essential service in case of an Attack, yet I judged it advisable, on their application and claim of such

Indulgences, to discharge them; as granting them, would set an Example to others and might produce many ill consequences. The Number of men included in the last return by this is lessened about 500.

I last Night received a Letter from Genl. Schuyler with several Inclosures, Copies of which I have herewith transmitted. They will give Congress every Information I have respecting our Northern Army and the Situation of our Affairs in that Quarter and to which I beg leave to refer their attention. I cannot but express my surprize at the scarcity of Provisions which General Schuyler mentions, after what the Commissary assured me and which formed a part of my Letter of the 14th. He still assures me of the same. This is a distressing circumstance, as every Article of Provision and every thing else necessary for that

## Library of Congress

department, can have no other now, than a Land conveyance, the Water communication from hence to Albany being entirely cut off.

Congress will please to consider the Inclosure No. 6 about raising six Companies out of the Inhabitants about the Lakes, to prevent the Incursions of the Indians. The General Officers in their Minutes of Council have determined it a matter of much Importance, and their attention to the price of Goods furnished the Soldiery may be extremely necessary. They have complained much upon this head.

The Retreat from Crown Point seems to be considered

in opposite views by the General and Field Officers. The former I am satisfied have weighed the matter well, and yet the reasons assigned by the Latter against it appear Strong and forcible; I hope what ever is done will be for the best. I was apprehensive the Appointment of General Gates over General Sullivan would give the latter disgust. His Letter I transmitted Congress seemed to Warrant the Suspicion.—he is not arrived yet, when he does, I shall try to settle the Affair and prevail on him to continue, as I think his resignation will take from the service a useful and Good Officer.<sup>54</sup>

By a Letter from the Committee of Orange County, received this Morning, the Men of War and Tenders were Yesterday at Haverstraw Bay, about 40 miles above this. A number of Men in four Barges from the Tenders attempted to land; with a view they suppose of taking some Sheep and Cattle that had been previously removed. A small number of Militia that was collected, obliged them to retreat without their doing any damage with their Cannon. They were sounding the Water up towards the Highlands, by which it is probable they will attempt to pass with part of the Fleet if possible.

Yesterday Evening a Flagg came from

54. This was the age-old dispute between the line and the staff. On June 17, 1775, Gates was appointed Adjutant General of the Continental Army with the rank of brigadier general.

## Library of Congress

Sullivan was appointed a brigadier general in the line of the Army June 22, 1775. Gates was promoted to major general May 16, 1776, and Sullivan was not raised to that rank until Aug. 9, 1776. Sparks quotes his letter of July 6 to General Schuyler: "I ever was desirous, that some officer superior in rank should relieve me from this disagreeable command, and should with pleasure have remained in the army and served under him; but, Congress having thought proper to supersede me by appointing General Gates, who had not, by the rank they were pleased formerly to confer upon us, the same pretension as myself, I can construe this in no other light, than to suppose Congress were apprehensive that I was not equal to the trust they were pleased to repose in me. If this be the case, I am bound in justice to my country to relinquish a command to which I am not equal. If this was not the foundation, and they had not such an opinion of me, surely my honor calls upon me to leave the service, after a person is put over me without any impeachment of my conduct." Sullivan went to Philadelphia and tendered his resignation; but after the reasons for promoting General Gates were explained to him by the President of Congress he asked leave to withdraw his application to resign, which was granted.

General Howe with a Letter addressed "*To George Washington Esquire &ca. &ca. &ca.*" It was not received on the same principle, that the one from Lord Howe was refused.<sup>55</sup> I have &ca.<sup>56</sup>

### **To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS**

New York, July 17, 1776.

Sir: Colonel Hand<sup>57</sup> having informed me that he means to purchase Regimentals for his Battalion in Philadelphia; I must take the Liberty to request you, will have the Nine Thousand dollars resolved by Congress on the 12th. Ulto, to be paid him here for that purpose, to be advanced to him or his order there. The State of our Chest is extremely low and many pressing demands against it, besides as the Clothes are to be paid for there,



## Library of Congress

It seems unnecessary to send Money from hence. An Account of the advance, may be transmitted, in order to a Stoppage from the Mens pay. I have &ca.

55. General Howe gave the following account of this matter in a letter to Lord George Germaine (August 6): "The Commander-in-chief of the rebel forces sent me the enclosed letter and narrative of some past transactions in Canada, which I thought proper to answer in general terms, directing to 'George Washington, Esq., &c., &c., &c.' as the most unexceptionable mode of address. The officer sent to receive the flag would not receive my letter, as it did not express his General's titles. In consequence of which I sent Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson, adjutant-general, a few days afterwards to remonstrate upon this, and other circumstances relative to the usage of General Prescott, and several officers in the enemy's possession, and to mention an exchange of prisoners. This interview was more polite than interesting. However, it induced me to change my superscription for the attainment of an end so desirable; and in this view I flatter myself it will not be disapproved."— *Sparks*.

56. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.

57. Col. Edward Hand, of the First Continental Infantry. He was colonel of the First Pennsylvania Regiment; brigadier general; Adjutant General of the Continental Army from Jan. 8, 1781, to Nov. 3, 1783; brevet major general Sept. 30, 1781.

### To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

New York, Eight O'Clock, P.M., August 27, 1776.

Sir: I this minute returned from our Lines on Long Island, where I left his Excellency the General. From him I have It in command to Inform Congress, that yesterday he went there, and continued till Evening, when, from the Enemy's having landed a considerable part of their Forces, and from many of their movements, there was reason to apprehend they would make in a little time a General

## Library of Congress

Attack. As they would have a Wood to pass through before they could approach the Lines, it was thought expedient to place a number of men there on the different Roads leading from whence they were stationed, in order to harass and annoy them in their March. This being done, early this morning a Smart engagement ensued between the Enemy and our Detachments, which, being unequal to the force they had to contend with, have sustained a pretty considerable loss. At least many of our Men are missing, among those that have not returned, are General Sullivan and Lord Stirling. The Enemy's loss is not known certainly; but we are told by such of our Troops as were in the Engagement, and what have come in, that they had many killed and wounded. Our party brought off a Lieutenant, Sergeant, and Corporal, with twenty privates, prisoners.

While These Detachments were engaged, a Column of the enemy descended from the Woods, and marched towards the Centre of our Lines with a design to make an Impression, but were repulsed. This Evening they appeared very numerous about the Skirts of the Woods, where they have pitched Several Tents; and his Excellency Inclines to think they mean to attack and force us from our Lines by way of regular approaches, rather than in any other manner.

To day Five Ships of the Line came up towards the Town, where they seemed desirous of getting, as they

turned a long time against an unfavorable Wind; and, on my return this Evening, I found a Deserter from the 23d Regiment, who Informed me that they design, as soon as the Wind will permit'em to come up, to give us a Severe Cannonade, and to Silence our Batteries, If possible. I have the honor etc.

Robt H. Harrison .

## To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

## Library of Congress

New York, September 2, 1776.

Sir: As my Intelligence of late has been rather unfavorable and would be received with anxiety and concern, peculiarly happy should I esteem myself, were it in my power at this Time, to transmit such Information to Congress, as would be more pleasing and agreeable to their wishes: But unfortunately for me, unfortunately for them, It is not.

Our situation is truly distressing. The Check our Detachment sustained on the 27th. Ulto. has dispirited too great a proportion of our Troops and filled their minds with apprehension and despair. The Militia, instead of calling forth their utmost efforts to a brave and manly opposition, in order to repair our Losses, are dismayed, Intractable and Impatient to return. Great numbers of them have gone off, in some instances almost by whole Regiments, by half ones and by Companies at a Time. This circumstance of itself, Independent of others, when fronted by a well appointed Enemy, superior in number to our whole collected force, would be sufficiently disagreeable, but when their example has Infected another part of the Army, When their want of discipline and refusal, of almost every kind of restraint and Government, have produced a like conduct but too common

to the whole, and an entire disregard of that order and Subordination necessary to the well doing of an Army, and which had been inculcated before, as well as the nature of our Military establishment would admit of, our Condition is still more Alarming, and with the deepest concern I am obliged to confess my want of confidence, in the generality of the Troops. All these circumstances fully confirm the Opinion I ever entertained, and which I more than once in my letters took the Liberty of mentioning to Congress, That no dependence could be in a Militia or other Troops than those enlisted and embodied for a longer period than our regulations heretofore have prescribed. I am persuaded and as fully convinced, as I am of any one fact that has happened, that our Liberties must of necessity be greatly hazarded, If not entirely lost, If their defence is left to any but a permanent standing Army, I mean one to exist during the War. Nor would the expence incident to the support of such a body of Troops as would be competent almost to every exigency, far

## Library of Congress

exceed that which is daily incurred, by calling in Succour and new Inlistments, and which when effected are not attended with any good consequences. Men who have been free and subject to no controul, cannot be reduced to order in an Instant, and the Priviledges and exemptions they claim and will have, Influence the Conduct of others, and the aid derived from them is nearly counterbalanced by the disorder, irregularity and confusion

they Occasion. I can not find that the Bounty of Ten Dollars is likely to produce the desired effect. When men can get double that sum to engage for a month or two in the Militia and that Militia frequently called out,—It can hardly be expected. The addition of Land might have a considerable Influence on a permanent Inlistment<sup>6</sup> Our number of men at present fit for duty are under 20,000. They were so by the last return and best accounts I could get, after the Engagement on Long Island, since which numbers have deserted.

I have ordered General Mercer to send the men intended for the Flying Camp to this place, about a thousand in number and to try with the Militia, if practicable, to make a diversion upon Staten Island. Till of late I had no doubt in my own mind of defending this place, nor should I have yet, if the men would do their duty, but this I despair of. It is painful and extremely grating to me, to give such unfavourable Accounts, but it would be still more criminal to conceal the Truth at so critical a Juncture. Every power I possess shall be exerted to serve the Cause, and my first wish is, that whatever may be the event, the Congress will do me the Justice to think so. If we should be obliged to abandon the Town, ought it to stand as Winter Quarters for the Enemy ? They would derive great conveniences from it on the one hand, and much property would be destroyed on the other. It is an Important question, but will

6. On September 16 it was resolved: “That Congress make provision, for granting lands, in the following proportions...such lands to be provided by the United States, and whatever expense shall be necessary to procure such land, the said expence shall be paid and borne by the states in the same proportion as the other expences of the war, viz. To a

## Library of Congress

colonel 500 acres; to a lieutenant colonel, 450; to a major, 400; to a captain, 300; to a lieutenant, 200; to an ensign, 150; each non-commissioned officer and soldier, 100.”

admit of but little time for deliberation. At present I dare say the Enemy mean to preserve it, if they can. If Congress therefore should resolve upon the destruction of it, the Resolution should be a profound secret, as the Knowledge of it will make a Capital change in their plans.<sup>7</sup> I have the Honor &c.<sup>8</sup>

7. This letter was read in Congress September 3; at once considered in Committee of the Whole, and resolution adopted for reinforcing Washington with three battalions from Virginia, two from North Carolina and one from Rhode Island. The States north of Virginia were urged to send all the aid in their power to the army at New York. It was also resolved: “That General Washington be acquainted, that Congress would have special care taken, in case he should find it necessary to quit New York, that no damage be done to the said city by his troops on their leaving it: The Congress having no doubt of being able to recover the same, though the enemy should, for a time, obtain possession of it.” (See *Journals of the Continental Congress*.)

8. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.

### **To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS**

Head Quarters, New York, September 8, 1776.

Sir: Since I had the Honor of addressing you on the 6th. instant, I have called a Council of the General Officers, in

order to take a full and comprehensive view of our Situation and thereupon form such a plan of future defence, as may be immediately pursued and subject to no other Alteration than a change of Operations on the Enemy's side may occasion.<sup>27</sup> Before the landing of the Enemy on Long Island, the point of Attack could not be known or any satisfactory

## Library of Congress

Judgment formed of their Intentions. It might be on Long Island, on Bergen or directly on the City, this made it necessary to be prepared for each, and has occasioned an Expence of Labour which now seems useless and is regretted by those who form a Judgment from after Knowledge. But I trust, men of discernment will think differently and see that by such Works and preparations we have not only delayed the Operations of the Campaign, till it is too late to effect any capital Incursion into the Country, but have drawn the Enemy's forces to one point and obliged them to decline their plan, so as to enable us to form our defence on some Certainty. It is now extremely obvious, from all Intelligence, from their movements and every other circumstance, that having landed their whole Army on Long Island (except about 4000, on Staten Island) they mean to enclose us on the Island of New York by taking post in our Rear, while the Shipping effectually secure the Front, and thus either by cutting off our communication with the Country, oblige us to fight them on their own Terms, or surrender at discretion, or by a brilliant Stroke endeavour to cut this Army in pieces and secure the Collection of Arms and Stores which they well know we shall not be soon able to replace.

Having therefore their System unfolded to us, it became an impor-

27. The record of this council of war (held September 7) is missing from the *Washington Papers*. It was evidently missing in 1781, as there is a blank page left in the Varick Transcripts where it should have been entered.

-tant consideration how it could be most successfully opposed. On every side there is a Choice of difficulties and every Measure on our part (however painful the reflection is from experience) to be formed with some Apprehension that all our Troops will not do their duty.

In deliberating on this Question it was impossible to forget, that History, our own experience, the advice of our ablest Friends in Europe, the fears of the Enemy, and even the Declarations of Congress demonstrate, that on our Side the War should be defensive. It has even been called a War of Posts. That we should on all Occasions avoid a general

## Library of Congress

Action, or put anything to the Risque, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn.

The Arguments on which such a System was founded were deemed unanswerable and experience has given her sanction. With these views, and being fully persuaded that it would be presumption to draw out our Young Troops into open ground, against their Superiors both in number and Discipline; I have never spared the Spade and Pick Ax; I confess I have not found that readiness to defend even strong Posts, at all hazards, which is necessary to derive the greatest benefit from them. The honor of making a brave defence does not seem to be a sufficient stimulus, when the success is very doubtful, and the falling into the Enemy's hands probable. But I doubt not this will be gradually attained. We are now in a strong Post, but not an Impregnable one, nay acknowledged by every man of Judgment to be untenable, unless the Enemy will make the Attack upon Lines, when they can avoid it and their Movements indicate that they

mean to do so. To draw the whole Army together in order to arrange the defence proportionate to the extent of Lines and works, would leave the Country open to an Approach and put the fate of this Army and its Stores on the hazard of making a successful defence in the City, or the Issue of an Engagement out of it. On the other hand to abandon a City, which has been by some deemed defensible and on whose Works much Labour has been bestowed, has a tendency to dispirit the Troops and enfeeble our Cause. It has also been considered as the Key to the Northern Country. But as to this I am fully of opinion, that by Establishing of strong posts at Mont Washington on the upper part of this Island and on the Jersey side opposite to it, with the Assistance of the Obstructions already made and which may be improved in the Water, that not only the navigation of Hudson's River but an easier and better communication, may be effectually secured between the Northern and Southern States. This I believe every one acquainted with the situation of the Country will readily agree to, and will appear evident to those who have an Opportunity of recurring to good maps. These and the many other consequences, which will be involved in the determination of our next measure, have given our Minds full employ

## Library of Congress

and led every one to form a Judgement, as the various objects presented themselves to his view. The post at Kings Bridge is naturally strong and is pretty well fortified the Heights about it are commanding and might soon be made more so.

These are important Objects and I have attended to them accordingly. I have also removed from the City all the Stores and Ammunition,

except what was absolutely Necessary for its defence and made every other Disposition that did not essentially interfere with that Object, carefully keeping in view, until it should be absolutely determined on full consideration, how far the City was to be defended at all events. In resolving points of such Importance, many circumstances peculiar to our own Army, also occur; being Provided only for a Summers Campaign, their Cloaths, Shoes and Blanketts will soon be unfit for the change of weather which we every day feel. At present we have not Tents for more than #ds., many of them old and worn out, but if we had a Plentiful supply the season will not admit of continuing in them much longer.

The case of our Sick is also worthy of much consideration, their number by the returns form at least  $\frac{1}{4}$ th. of the Army: Policy and humanity require they should be made as comfortable as possible. With these and many other circumstances before them, the whole Council of General Officers, met Yesterday, in order to adopt some general line of Conduct to be pursued at this important crisis; I intended to have procured their seperate opinions on each point, but time would not admit I was Obligated to collect their sense more generally than I could have wished; We all agreed that the Town was not tenable if the Enemy was resolved to bombard and Cannonade it: But the difficulties attending a removal operated so strongly, that a Course was taken between abandoning it totally and concentrating our whole strength for its defence; nor were some a little

influenced in their Opinion, to whom the determination of Congress was known, against an Evacuation totally; suspecting that Congress wished it to be maintained at every hazard,<sup>28</sup> It was concluded to arrange the Army under three Divisions 5000 to remain for the defence



## Library of Congress

of the City, 9000 to remove to Kingsbridge, as well to Possess and secure those Posts, as to be ready to Attack the Enemy, who are moving Eastward on long Island, if they should attempt to land on this side; The remainder to occupy the intermediate space and support either, that the sick should be immediately removed to Orange Town—and Barracks prepared at Kingsbridge with all expedition, to cover the Troops; there were some Generals in whose Judgments great confidence is to be reposed, that were for an immediate removal from the City, urging the great danger of one part of our Army being cut off, before the other can support it, The extremities being at least 16 Miles apart; that our Army when collected is inferior to the Enemy; that they can move with their whole force to any point of Attack and consequently must succeed, by weight of numbers, if they have only a part to oppose them; that by removing from hence we deprive the Enemy of the Advantage of their Ships, which will make at least one half of the force to attack the Town; that we keep them at bay, but put nothing to the hazard and at all events keep an Army together, which can be recruited another Year; that the unspent Stores will also be preserved, and in this case the heavy Artillery can be secured.—But they were overruled by a Majority, who

28. Washington's letter was read in Congress (September 10), and it was resolved “That Mr. President inform General Washington, it was by no means the sense of Congress in their resolve of the third inst. respecting New York, that the army, or any part of it, should remain in that city a moment longer than he shall think it proper for the public service that troops be continued there.” (See *Journals of the Continental Congress*.)

thought for the present a part of our force might be kept here and attempt to maintain the City a while longer.<sup>29</sup> I am sensible a retreating Army is incircled with difficulties, that the declining an Engagement subjects a General to reproach and that the common Cause may be in some measure affected by the discouragements which it throws over the minds of many; nor am I insensible of the contrary effects, if a brilliant stroke could be made with any Probability of success, especially after our loss upon Long Island: but when the fate of America may be at stake on the Issue; when the Wisdom of cooler moments and

## Library of Congress

experienced Men have decided that we should protract the War if Possible; I cannot think it safe or wise to adopt a different System, when the season for Action draws so near a close. That the Enemy mean to Winter in New York there can be no doubt; that with such an Armament they can drive us out is equally clear. The Congress having resolved, that it should not be destroyed, nothing seems to remain but to determine the time of their taking Possession It is our Interest and wish to prolong it, as much as possible, provided the delay does not affect our further measures. The Militia of Connecticut is reduced from 800030 to less than 2000 and in a few days will be merely nominal; the arrival of some Maryland Troops &c. from the flying Camp, has in a great degree supplied the loss of Men, but the Ammunition they have carried away will be a loss sensibly felt. The impulse for going home was so irresistable, it answered no purpose to

29. General Greene was urgent for the immediate evacuation of New York and the destruction of the city. The entire difficulty over New York rested with the strong loyalist element and the natural objection to a heavy property loss, which latter placed too great a strain upon the immature and green patriotism of the citizens. John Jay was one of the few New Yorkers who was willing to see the city destroyed rather than allow it to become an advantage to the British. Greene's arguments are in the *Washington Papers* under date of Sept. 5, 1776, and fill seven pages. They are printed in Force's *American Archives*, Fifth Series, vol. 2, 182.

30. Harrison wrote 6000, but a later pen change makes it 8000.

oppose it, tho' I could not discharge, I have been obliged to acquiesce; and it affords one more melancholy Proof how delusive such dependences are.

Inclosed I have the Honor to transmit a General Return of the Army, the first I have been able to obtain for a considerable time; Also a report from Captain Newel<sup>31</sup> from our Works at Horn's Hook, or Hell Gate; their situation is extremely low and the sound so very narrow that the Enemy have 'em much within their Command. I have &ca.

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P.S. The Inclosed information this minute came to Hand,<sup>32</sup> I am in hopes we shall hence forth get regular Intelligence of the Enemy's Movement.<sup>33</sup>

31. Capt. Eliphalet Newhall, of Knox's artillery.

32. The intelligence was from Isaac Nicoll at New Rochelle, N.Y. Washington forwarded the original, and it is filed with his letter in the Papers of the *Continental Congress*.

33. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.

### **To THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS**

Head Quarters, Heights of Harlem, September 22, 1776.

Sir: I have nothing in particular to communicate to Congress respecting the situation of our Affairs, It is much the same as when I had the Honor of addressing you last.

On Friday night, about Eleven or twelve O'Clock a fire<sup>8</sup> broke out in the City of New York, near the New or St. Pauls Church, as It is said, which continued to burn pretty rapidly till after Sunrise the next morning. I have not been Informed how the Accident happened, nor received any certain Account of the damage. Reports says many Houses between the Broadway and the River were consumed. I have the Honor to be &ca.<sup>9</sup>

8. Responsibility for the fire does not rest with any official, civil or military. It was probably started to cover looting by the criminal element. There were many exaggerated reports published in the London papers in October, in which the usual tales of bad blood between the New England and other troops are again recounted. The New Englanders wanted to burn the town but were prevented by the New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians, according to the *London Chronicle*.

*The Pennsylvania Journal* of Oct, 20, 1776, states: "The fire originated at or near Whitehall, soon extended to the Exchange, took its course up the west side of Broad

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Street, as far as Verlattenberg Hill, consuming all the blocks from the Whitehall up. The flames extended across the Broadway from the house of Mr. David Johnson to Beaver Lane, or Fischer's Alley, on the west, and carried all before it, a few buildings excepted, to the house at the corner of Barclay Street, wherein the late Mr. Adam Vandenberg lived, sweeping the cross streets in the way....The cause of the fire is not known. We imagine about a 6th part of the whole city is destroyed.”

Sparks notes that in describing this catastrophe the British commander wrote to Lord George Germain on the 23d that the town was set on fire in several places with matches and combustibles that had been prepared with great art and ingenuity. He added: “Many were detected in the act, and some killed upon the spot by the enraged troops in garrison; and had it not been for the exertions of Major-General Robertson, the officers under his command in town, and the brigade of guards detached from the camp, the whole must infallibly have been consumed, as the night was extremely windy. The destruction is computed to be about one quarter of the town.”

9. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.